

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Pell City Downtown District
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1900-2111 Cogwell Avenue; 2008 First Avenue South; 8 North 21st Street; 10 South 20th Street

city or town Pell City Vicinity: N/A Not for publication N/A state Alabama
code AL county St. Clair code 115 zip code 35125

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 8/29/01
Signature of certifying official Date

ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION (STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE)
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register Entered in the 10.29.01
National Register
See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register _____
See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register _____
- removed from the National Register _____
- other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Non-contributing	
<u>17</u>	<u>9</u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>17</u>	<u>9</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>COMMERCE/TRADE</u>	Sub: <u>Specialty stores</u>
<u>SOCIAL</u>	<u>Meeting hall</u>
<u>GOVERNMENT:</u>	<u>Post Office</u>
<u>FUNERARY</u>	<u>Funeral home</u>

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>COMMERCE/TRADE</u>	Sub: <u>Specialty stores</u>
<u> </u>	<u>Financial institution</u>
<u> </u>	<u>Professional</u>

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: OTHER:

- One-storey commercial block
- Multiple-storey commercial block

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	<u>BRICK</u>	other: <u>STONE</u>
roof	<u>ASPHALT</u>	
walls	<u>BRICK</u>	
	<u>CONCRETE BLOCK</u>	

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See attached Continuation Sheets.

=====

8. Statement of Significance

=====

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply): N/A

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1890-1951 Significant Dates: 1890-91
1902
1933

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

Architect/Builder: N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See attached Continuation Sheets.

=====

9. Major Bibliographical References

=====

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

See attached Continuation Sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS) N/A

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency: Alabama State Archives

Federal agency

Local government: St. Clair County Courthouse Archives

University

Other:

Name of repository: Pell City Library Historical Files; private collection of Kate DeGaris

=====

10. Geographical Data

=====

Acreage of Property: 50 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

1 16 566260 3716350 3 16 566570 3716330

2 16 566500 3716440 4 16 566290 3716260

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====

11. Form Prepared By

=====

name/title Linda Nelson and Trina Binkley, AHC reviewer

organization FuturePast

date OCTOBER 2000

street & number 4700 Seventh Court South

telephone (205) 592-6610

city or town Birmingham

state AL zip code 35222

=====

Additional Documentation

=====

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

=====

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

=====

Property Owner

=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name Multiple

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

=====

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====

Description

The proposed historic district in Pell City's downtown consists of two long blocks along Cogswell Avenue, the main street, and a few buildings that lie along 21st Street North and 20th Street South just off Cogswell. Of the 26 buildings in this proposed district, 17 or 65% are contributing and 9 or 35% are non-contributing; of the latter 9, three are NC because of their later construction dates, while the rest are rendered non-contributing because of unsympathetic modernizations.

This district is the heart of the historic downtown, lacking only the Courthouse block and the buildings directly across from it along the 1800 block of Cogswell; these were excluded due to the modern construction of the present Courthouse (1955-56) and the degree of alteration of the buildings directly across from it, making that block non-contributing at the present time. On the other end and beyond the east boundary of the district, the downtown is separated from the historic Avondale Mill complex and village by U.S. Route 231, which in the course of recent developments has been widened and become a commercial strip.

Pell City is an incorporated town of about 10,400 people, situated 35 miles east of Birmingham near the Coosa River in south St. Clair County, Alabama. As its history (below) indicates, it was founded on a speculative basis by men who were building railroads through Alabama, although today it is only served by the Southern system. Its location near the river, the railroad, good farmland, and the coal and mineral fields of central Alabama made it a natural site for settlement, and over the years Pell City surpassed earlier nearby St. Clair towns in political and economic success. Its old downtown is very typical of American towns of the late 19th and early 20th centuries: rows of modest but well built commercial and public buildings arranged along a straight main street paralleling and one block removed from the railroad, the Courthouse occupying its own block, and decades of change and modernization accreted on many of the old masonry building facades.

In terms of plan, Pell City is a variant of what is known as the symmetrical town plan, with a commercial row paralleling the railroad on one side, in this case the north; it varies from the typical in that the main street is a full block away from the tracks so that the backs of the south-side buildings actually face the railroad avenue (now First Avenue South-- "south" being south of the main street, not south of the tracks). There was at one time more intact commercial building along the railroad; early development there included the depot, which was destroyed as late as the 1970s, and the Cornett Hotel, an original building that burned in 1935. Other businesses included the newspaper office and for a time after 1949 the Post Office, but these ultimately moved or were displaced, and the primary commercial street remained Howard (later named Cogswell) Avenue.

With one exception, every Contributing building in the district is masonry: either all brick, brick over hollow tile, brick over block, or rock-face block. The exception is a metal quonset from the 1940s, now moved from its original location and sitting on a block base (Inventory #24). The buildings that are non-contributing because of their recent construction dates are fairly few; most of the non-contributing buildings are in that status because of alteration, some of it reversible. No building is over two storeys, and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 2

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

most are one storey. The oldest buildings (other than the Maxwell Block, 1890), dating from the first decade of the present century, show the same brick mason's hand in their decoration and general style, with simply patterned series of decorative courses below the flat parapets. Although the single hand is not a certainty, newspaper reports from the old *Coosa Valleyan* show that a Mr. A.J. Dunn built many of the major public and private buildings in the period 1902-05. There are five two-storey structures, four of them Contributing: the Pell City Drug Company built by Dr. R.A. Martin and still in the family and still a drug store (with a fountain! Inventory #2), the Pell City Hardware built by the Alversons and Moores of Coal City (Inventory #6), the buildings now comprising the Union State Bank (Inventory #s 19 and 20), and the Maxwell Block, the earliest and largest, built by a pioneering investor in the tanning trade, John Maxwell (Inventory #12).

Toward the east end of the district some of the oldest buildings on the north side of the 2000 block of Cogswell Avenue are separated from the 1900 block by a half block that had not been built on, reportedly due to excessive ground water, until the recent past but that now contains the c. 1968 Western Auto Store (Inventory #17). It is at this end of the district that the automotive buildings are concentrated, and a somewhat later period of building (1920-1935) is represented. Those still in automotive use include a c. 1929 service station (Inventory #22) and the Pell City Motor Company's body shop of c. 1925, now a tire company (Inventory #26).

Although many of the old buildings survive, the general feeling in the historic district is that the owners, if they could afford it, tried to modernize their buildings to compete with the inexorable competition of strip malls and suburban development. Fortunately, some of the finest buildings have been left alone, or nearly so, and many of the rest have only been covered up and not radically despoiled of their old faces. As appreciation grows for the historic integrity and style of the old buildings, Pell City's old downtown can regain much of its former appearance and become an antidote to the surrounding sprawl and congestion.

Archeological Potential:

There has been no formal archeological survey done of this area. It is, however, quite likely that subsurface remains exist, especially in and around the old foundations of some of the original buildings, which have in some cases been rebuilt over burned or demolished structures. Another potential area for archeological discovery might be the area— not in the present district but adjacent— along the railroad tracks, where earlier buildings such as the depot have been replaced in modern times.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 3

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====

INVENTORY

An inventory of the buildings in the district follows. They are listed by the names of their builders or original occupants if known, or by their best remembered long-term occupants; present use appears in parentheses if it is of relatively recent date and earlier names are also given. Architectural classification is generally based on that of Richard Longstreth's *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1987) in that they differentiate one-storey blocks, with varying degrees of sub-parapet decoration, from multiple- or (in Pell City's case) two-storey blocks with upper faces of distinct treatment because of their windows and various historic uses.

1. **Hamlin & Embry Law Offices, 1900-1902 Cogswell, 1981**

One-storey commercial block, an office building with broadly angled corner entrance, following the line of the original corner-oriented service station building. Faced with brick and with aspiring Colonial look but with large plate glass windows and paneled doors with sidelights; plain parapet. 1902 section is set back several feet from the building line with its own entrance. Built on the site of the WocoPep station of 1926, which was destroyed in 1977 by the builder, Joe Handler; this building was built as a law office for Mr. Hamlin, who subsequently purchased it. (Roll 1, #6,8) NC

2. **Pell City Drug Company, 1901 Cogswell, 1903, remodeled 1935, addition 1954**

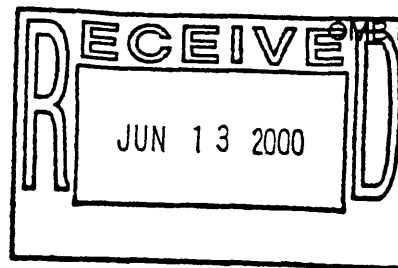
Two-storey commercial block, 25' frontage with long rear extension of later vintage. Brick, now painted, similar to other buildings on this block but with more elaborate parapet brickwork; three front bays above with 1-over-1 wood sash, now with metal awnings; 10 like windows along the 19th Street side. Lower storefront remodeled in 1935, now with electric blue masonite panels, a flat metal canopy and large Rexall sign in transom line; fine corner projecting sign. Rear extension of about 40 feet to alley, brick with glass block window and side entry and storefront windows, added 1954 on the site of the Drug Store's old ice cream shed. Interior of drug store is intact and extends inside all the way to the rear; the upstairs has been used for offices, meeting place, and other business and community space. Built by Dr. R.A. Martin for his drug business, and still in the family. (Roll 1, #3,4,5) C

3. **5' & 10 Cent Store (Griffin's Jewelers), 1903 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1905, altered**

One-storey 25' commercial block (or half of one, see #5 below), completely refaced in varitone pink/brown brick, corbeled out as it approaches the parapet; small recessed central entry flanked by two small plate windows designed for jewelry display; facade-wide fabric awning. (Roll 1, #7) NC

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET



Section 7 Page 4

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====

4. **Pell City Furniture/Harmon's Hardware (Tommie W. Fletcher, atty/Jean's Shoes), 1904-06 Cogswell Avenue, 1922**

One-storey commercial block, tile block construction with brick facade; a double block both sides of which have been altered: one side (1904) with transom obscured by a panel, its lower portion bricked over with used brick; single entry with awning; characteristic corbeled brick still visible under parapet on this side. Other side (1906) completely clad in metal with storefront recessing to entry. Rebuilt on the foundation of the burned 10-cent store. (Roll 1, #10) NC

5. **Alabama Power Company (Special Friends), 1905 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1905**

One-storey 25' commercial block, brick now painted white; projecting side piers and suggestions of corbeled capitals at beginning of upper face, which retains its blind molded panel below the flat parapet and terra cotta coping. Replacement aluminum-and-glass storefront on paneled wood bulkheads; recessed central entry; canvas awning. Transom line now obscured by wood panels, which also reduces the show window height. The building's age is indicated on the alley rear: red brick with segmental-head door and windows; old photographs show that it is half of a double block with 1903; this half is more superficially altered, and the original rear wall is visible from the alley. (Roll 1, #9) C

6. **Pell City Hardware/Gossett Hardware (Absolute Fitness/Law Offices), 1908-10 Cogswell Ave., 1904, c. 1930**

A c. 60' one- and two-storey commercial block, the east half of which is two storeys: brick now painted; one-storey half has a plain upper face with characteristic cornice-line corbeling and brick-corner row below a flat parapet. Upper windows on two-storey portion are 3V-over-1 wood sash with translucent glazing beneath segmental-arch heads with corbeled eyebrow moldings. Bays defined by side and central pilasters, slightly projecting. Transom intact with square translucent panes; later aluminum-and-glass storefronts inserted on old bulkhead frame; single canvas barrel awning. The one-storey half, originally a lean-to dependency of the older building, was later enclosed and faced to match the original; it now has reflective film over the storefront windows. Built by the Alversons and Moores of Coal City for their hardware business when Pell City was becoming a commercial center. (Roll 1, #13,14) C

7. **DeGaris Drug Store (vacant), 1907 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1905, refaced 1920s**

One-storey commercial block, 25' frontage, unpressed varitone red brick with raised parapet for two-thirds of its frontage; distinctive decorative brickwork: corbeling to resemble brackets, a soldier course in two rows, one in the parapet. The storefront piers retain scraps of black Carrara glass; transom line intact but covered by translucent plastic panels. Altered storefront: aluminum framing, recessing to single door in what had apparently been a double-door space. Mid-century block extension to alley with sign: "Prescription: Rear Entrance". The front was probably refaced with decorative brick when Jack DeGaris opened the drug store in 1926 in a building built by Sumter Cogswell; in any case the present face was there by 1929. The Carrara glass probably dates from the 1940s. The interior retains its cabinetry and terra cotta tile floor. (Roll 1, #11) C

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 5

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

8. **Herb Shop/Pell City Shoe Repair, 1909-11 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1905**

One-storey commercial block, 25' frontage now divided into two narrow stores with varying facade treatments over a terra cotta block core. Herb Shop (west half) more intact: painted dark green with recessed blind panel in upper face (this panel intact across building face); transom line visible but occluded; 1950-ish brick inserted in bulkheads. Aluminum-and-glass storefront, off-center entry. The other shop is painted white with transom completely covered by wood panels, storefront now framed in wood. Air conditioners protrude on both sides. (Roll 1, #12) NC but this is potentially reversible.

9. **Western Auto (Community Credit), 1912 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1905**

One-storey commercial block, 25' frontage, resembling #11 below, built slightly elevated from its neighbor to follow the grade of the sidewalk. Storefront redone: brick with characteristic sawtooth course near parapet, now painted dark brown; dark tinted reflective windows in anodized aluminum frames and false transom panels inserted on old bulkhead frame; recessed central entry. (Roll 1, #16) NC in its current condition.

10. **U.S. Post Office/Vada's (Pamela's Dance Dynamics), 1913 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1905, altered 1949**

One-storey commercial block, 25' frontage, refaced in 1940s with its upper face covered in modern red brick and black Carrara glass on the storefront masonry. Aluminum and glass inserted in old storefront, recessed central entry; strip of metal flashing across the join of new brick and old front, where the awning should be. Built by Sumter Cogswell, this was the location of the U.S. Post Office from 1914 to 1949, when the PO moved down to Railroad Avenue in the 1800 block. A commercial alteration at that point resulted in its present appearance. (Roll 1, #15) C

11. **Julius Mitnick Department Store/White Auto Store (World of Music/Nationwide Insurance), 1914-16 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1905**

One-storey commercial block, 50' frontage, a double block of painted brick; blind recessed panels above storefront; one course of honeycomb brickwork below terra cotta coping, some of coping now broken off. Left transom still intact but covered by a sheet of translucent pebble glass or plastic; other transom occluded by solid panels. Central recessed entries in aluminum-and-plate glass storefronts set on the old brick bulkheads. This is probably J.L. North's building for Jake Garry, 1904, and in the Garry estate until fairly recently. (Roll 1, #20) C

12. **Maxwell Block, 1915-1921 Cogswell Avenue, 1890-91**

Two-storey commercial block, 100' frontage, varitone red brick construction, configured slightly differently in each of two 50' sections. Western-most (left, facing the building) is a three-bay section with windows paired-single-paired, bays defined by pilasters and a spandrel panel above the windows that creates recessed panels below the parapet. Other half has pilasters rising all the way to the parapet, corbeled out at tops; windows are in same grouping as other side's. Upper windows are occluded by wooden panels except for their 15-light overlights, with flat stone headers and sills. Storefront transom line covered in corrugated tin; variously altered storefronts, mostly clad in tin

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 6

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====

Maxwell Block continued:

with aluminum-and-glass insets, with flat canopies over some store fronts. On the rear, half the building has been redone, the other half largely original in appearance: segmental-arch window heads in original section, straight-head openings in the patched half. The upstairs interior is in remarkably original condition, but materially deteriorated.

This is a major historic property in Pell City, the only building to survive the panic and receivership of 1893; it was partially refaced after suffering damage in the 1902 depot explosion. In 1975 the upstairs windows were blown out in a storm. (Roll 1, #17,18,19) C

13. **Truitt Furniture/Cohen's Department Store (Bain & Stevens, attorneys), 1918
Cogswell Avenue, c. 1905 (refaced c. 1940)**

One-storey 25' commercial building, red brick now painted yellow; transom intact with translucent lights; slightly recessed storefront with central double entry; canvas awning. Flat parapet with terra cotta coping; upper face has simple decoration of brick inlay pattern in stretchers and headers creating a cross design. This may be S.E. Kilgroe's building of 1902, but it has been refaced, probably 1939 when the Cohen house was built with the same masonry style. Elizabeth Cogswell Starnes says this building housed Leroy Truitt's furniture store, the first in Pell City, opened in 1906. (Roll 1, #21) C

14. **Gilreath Printing, 1923 Cogswell Avenue, 1998**

Broad-gable-front commercial building in log cabin style, with shed porch roof supported by posts; 1-over-1 wood sash windows on front and along 20th Street side; double central entry doors. At the time of the survey (1998) just being finished for Gilreath Printing Co.; built on the site of the Bank of St. Clair County (later Union State Bank), a classical temple-front bank building destroyed in 1969 for no discernible reason other than provision of parking for the grocery store in the Maxwell Block. (Roll 1, #33) NC

15. **Willingham Building (Factory Connection), 21st & Cogswell, 1920**

One-storey commercial block, 50' frontage, a double block constructed of orange brick, the bays delineated by piers; transom occluded; storefront masonry rebricked with veneer of used brick but upper face original; flat metal canopy; wood storefront cornice. Upper cornice line corbeled with a course of sawtooth brick corners (a style repeating itself down the street); flat parapet and terra cotta coping. Side wall along 21st Street retains small, high segmental-head windows. Building has been sand-blasted, but otherwise left alone. Built by J.H. Willingham as a furniture store, which typically evolved as well into an undertaking business; divided 1960s to house Hagan Drugs and Roberson's Clothing, but now returned to single-tenant occupancy. (Roll 1, #22) C

16. **Pell City Motor Company [Ford] (Elijah's Barrel), 2004 Cogswell Avenue, 1920**

One-storey commercial block, an automotive sales and service building with 100' facade, brick painted a buff color; stepped parapet, lozenge inset pattern on face above storefront; modernized storefront, barrel awning. This downtown dealership site was abandoned in favor of the highway. (Roll 1, #24) C

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 7

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====

17. **Western Auto (Goodman's Home Center), Cogswell Avenue, 2007 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1968**

One-storey free-standing commercial block, 50' facade; buff brick veneer, with modern storefront recessed to center between side walls; shallow flat metal canopy. Built by Jim Embry and occupied by Western Auto store until January, 2000, when long-time manager Goodman discontinued his franchise and began another business. (Roll 1, #25) NC

18. **Dycus Drive-in/Self-Service Laundry (vacant), 2012 Cogswell Avenue, 1947-1948**

One-storey drive-in restaurant, free-standing with parking lot around it; brick and concrete block with east-side exterior chimney for barbeque; hip roof; front portion glassed. Built by Sam Dycus and a popular hang-out that closed in the late 1960s; it later became a self-service laundry and is now used for storage. (Roll 1, #32) C

19. **Shockley's/Fowler's General Merchandise/ Jefferson Home Furniture (Union State Bank Operations Center), 2019 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1905, altered**

Two-storey double commercial block, 50' frontage, the other two-thirds of Number 20 below, these having the appearance of a completely different building other than the name of the bank on the door. Early the home of two general merchandise establishments, Shockley's and Fowler's, it became the home of Jefferson Home Furniture Company, which refaced it. It was finally sold to the bank, which refaced it again. This part completely covered in EIFS, including the segmental window heads. (Roll 1, #26) NC

20. **Griffis & Saylor's (Union State Bank), 2021 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1905**

One third of a two-storey commercial block (see #19 above), painted brick; three bays defined by projecting pilasters; corbeled cornice line banded with rusticated stone, which is also painted. Segmental-arch window heads upstairs with narrow stone course above following the arches; replacement 4-over-4 sash on front, but original or early 2-over-2s on the side. Storefront windows now tinted sheets; fabric barrel awning. (Roll 1, #28) C

21. **Bank of St. Clair County/Kilgroe's Grocery/Polk's Grocery (Hair Center), 2023 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1905**

One-storey commercial block, 22' facade, side wall stepping back to the rear, everything fully covered in EIFS; storefront altered, blue canvas awning. The old vault is reportedly still in the rear of the building. (Roll 1, #27) NC

22. **Nixon Texaco Service (Auto Works), 2101 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1929**

One-storey automotive service station, painted brick, broad-angled hip roof; one projecting service bay with cast iron support; two-bay garage, and office section; transom intact, 6-over-6 sash windows; applied stone bulkhead across front with rope mortaring. Largely original inside and out. (Roll 1, # 29) C

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 8

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====

23. **Service Station/Bukacek Plumbing (Christian Love Pantry), 2111 Cogswell Avenue, c. 1935**

One-storey automotive service station, white brick veneer with green tile roof, one projecting bay supported by brick piers; garage door now altered to be a storefront. Since 1982 a food bank operated by a consortium of local churches. (Roll 1, #30) C

24. **American Legion Quonset/Jefferson Home Warehouse (vacant), First Avenue South, c. 1946**

Metal Quonset on block foundation with a flat painted block facade topped by a stepped parapet; 6-light metal-frame windows along side. Originally a facility of the local American Legion post with a wooden dance floor, it was moved to its present location recently when construction of an Auto Zone store threatened its original site across 21st Street. It has also served as a warehouse for Jefferson Home Furniture Company, but it is now vacant. (Roll 1, #35) C

25. **Ellis Transmission/Gressett Performance, 8 North 21st Street, c. 1929**

One-storey automotive service building, concrete block construction with rusticated block face and corner brick quoining, flat parapet; three service bays, one of which has been converted to a picture window; two single pedestrian entries, office area in north half. The building has always been divided by a block wall but was at one time connected by a doorway, now sealed. Possibly at one time a foundry, based on a south wall ghost of what may have been a forge. (Roll 1, #31) C

26. **Pell City Ford Body Shop (Pell City Tire Company), 10 South 20th Street, c. 1925**

One-storey, c. 75' brick automotive service building: three blind panels across top, but bays defined here are not related to its street functions, which are an office entry and window, the latter now boarded; double roll-up garage doors (inserted 1988, replacing one window), and a brick wall with recessed tripartite window. Block addition with two more garage doors, added 1978. Terra cotta coping on the older portion; occluded windows along alley side. (Roll 1, #34) C

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section ⁸ Page ⁹

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====

Statement of Significance:

Pell City's Downtown District is being nominated to the National Register on the basis of Criterion A, Commerce, based on its status as St. Clair County's first and most successful commercial town in the New South vein, and of Criterion C, Architecture, based on its intact collection of late 19th- and early-to-mid 20th-century commercial buildings that represent a typical pattern of American town development.

CRITERION A: COMMERCE

From the beginning, it was clear to Pell City's founders that the town site was perfectly situated to take advantage of its proximity to coal and iron fields, cotton fields, water supply and cheap farm labor. Such a combination of resources was guaranteed to draw investment and to reward the boosterish commitment of its initial investors, whether they stayed to reap long-term profits or not. Founder Sumter Cogswell's 1909 promotional piece for the Pell City Realty Company is a classic example of New South surety and optimism; noting cheap land and abundant supplies, the tract finishes with an exhortation:

Pell City is situated in the center of the industrial development of Alabama, with Birmingham 35 miles west, Gadsden 40 miles north, Anniston 30 miles east and Talladega 21 miles south. Pell City is about the center of these thriving and growing cities and Pell City has every natural advantage of all of them, with the additional great natural advantage of the Coosa River. None of the cities named above, except Gadsden, is situated on a river, and with the opening of the Panama Canal and the completion of the locks on [the] Coosa River, four of which are already built, Pell City will grow by leaps and bounds and assume her natural place among the thriving cities of industrial Alabama.

. . . Pell City, with her invigorating and health-giving climate, and her competing lines of railroad, iron, coal, lumber and cotton, present the ideal place and opportunity for the building of a city of cotton, iron, clay and lumber industries— making a complete chain of industries from the raw material to the finished product.

All reasonable concessions, including free sites, will be given to meritorious enterprises wishing to locate at Pell City, Alabama.

Address--

PELL CITY REALTY COMPANY,
Sumter Cogswell, President.¹

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 10

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====

The advertising of concessions and free sites is very typical of the blandishments of the New South in attracting economic activity; it was effective, and has remained a staple of Southern industrial and business recruiting until the present. Pell City is in fact a good example of the success of such incentives in attracting northern capital to the South to take advantage of giveaways in land, resources, and labor. It seemed the best way at the time, since the South was rumored to be without any significant advantages other than opportunities for aggrandizement of wealth.

The present downtown district represents the development of businesses that located in Pell City to support and profit by the growth of the town's industrial and governmental enterprises. By 1902 Pell City boasted the first sawtooth cotton mill in the nation and an ancillary County seat for St. Clair County. Both of these entities added greatly to the population and general commercial activity of the town (the mill did not operate a commissary so did not compete with downtown business, by agreement of the owners). The fact of the mill, the County Courthouse, and the general concentration of business enterprise related to the growing population surrounding these activities had the practical result of making Pell City the busiest town in St. Clair County. It was promoted by investors, it had a mixture of natural and income resources, and it was ideally located to take advantage of transportation routes. The downtown district as presently nominated reflects the commercial life of Pell City up until the period of post-World War II expansion and concurrent changes in architectural and building styles and technology beginning about 1951.

CRITERION C: ARCHITECTURE

The buildings in this district represent development beginning in the critical year of 1902, with the single and important exception of the Maxwell Block of 1890-91, which survived from the earlier settlement (see History, below). These are modest masonry buildings with minimal decoration, many of them apparently built by the same brick mason's hand. They represent the town activities from the second period of its early growth to the mid-century. Of the 26 contributing buildings, two are service stations (originally), two are automotive service buildings, one is a metal quonset, and all the others are one- or two-storey commercial blocks. Except for the quonset, all are brick or brick-faced block, or in one case block-faced block, with plain to moderately decorated upper faces or parapets. Of the nine non-contributing buildings, three were built after 1951; the others are over 50 years old but have suffered typical mid-century alterations such as substitution of aluminum-and-glass storefronts; obscuring of transoms; facing of masonry with crimped metal or newer brick, and adhesion of dark or reflective films on store windows. Much of this overlay can be removed and the buildings restored to contributing status.

Because the Courthouse block is to the west of the present district and because no churches were ever within it, this little district has no gaping holes in it where significant structures used to be. It did have an open space, crossed by a stream at one time and now occupied by the former Western Auto (Inventory #17) building and collateral parking lots, but even this, though outside the Period of Significance, assumes its place in the natural development of the townscape. The only significant loss was the destruction of the temple-front Union State Bank, small and elegant, on the northwest corner of Cogswell and 20th Street, a site now occupied by Gilreath Printing (Inventory #14).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 1 1

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

History of Downtown Pell City

Pell City was the idea of some enterprising St. Clair County businessmen and influential investors. It was to some degree one of the many offspring of a late 1880s building boom in the New South, that region of pulsating ambition and exploitation of natural resources that inherited, from its defeat in the Civil War, the necessity of finding new ways to make money. Like Birmingham-- the most locally conspicuous example of a New South commercial and industrial city-- Pell City's origins were very tied to the location and intersection of the railroads that were criss-crossing the region to provide market access for raw materials and delivery of manufactured goods to consumers, in addition to moving people from place to place.

A contemporary source characterized the creation and development of Pell City in the following terms:

The story of Pell City is but the story of mineral development in Alabama, and will go down through the years to come as part of the history of the Seaboard Air Line railroad in this state.²

In 1887 a group of investors was building a rail line from Cartersville, Georgia west to the coal fields of Alabama; this line was originally called the Cartersville & Van Wert and was in the course of events named the East and West Rail Road Company of Alabama. Incorporators and officers of this line included men from Talladega and from Ashville in St. Clair County, but the primary investor was George H. Pell, a New Yorker whose business dealings and subsequent influence made him a participant in many a scheme. Their line was built westward from Georgia to intersect with two others in the Coosa Valley in Alabama: the Talladega & Coosa Valley and the Georgia Pacific. (Ultimately, the East & West would be absorbed by the Seaboard in 1904, while the Georgia Pacific would be bought out by the Southern and the Talladega & Coosa Valley merged with the Birmingham & Atlanta.) The T & CV was the best route from Talladega to both Atlanta and Birmingham; the point at which it connected with the other two lines made a logical spot for a town site. Several of the same local investors in the East & West formed the Pell City Land Company and had this nexus of slung-down track, Pell City, chartered in 1887 and named after the investor whose money was driving the railroad. The town originally consisted of a joint depot, the Cornett Hotel, and a few houses.

A major event in the little town's history occurred about three years after this, in the spring of 1890, when a man named Sumter Cogswell was delayed in Pell City while on his way to Talladega. Mr. Cogswell, an insurance agent, saw the potential in a town with three railroads, fertile farm lands and a location between two major markets.³ Since he had some hours in the town he made inquiries and learned that Pell City could be bought for \$50,000; he secured an option and ultimately managed the sale to the Pell City Iron & Land Company, his own creation. Pell City was incorporated in May, 1891. It began adding to its little stock of stores and houses, and the Hercules Pipe Company was located there, the first soil pipe plant in the South⁴. A short period of optimism and growth produced the Maxwell Block, the only

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 12

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====

building to survive the Panic of 1893 and ensuing financial collapse of the Pell City Iron & Land Company and the removal of the pipe plant to Anniston. Pell City became a ghost town, with only 40 residents left.

Mr. Cogswell knew nothing of this until he was again passing through Pell City in 1901 and saw the devastation. Land values had fallen so low that he was able to repurchase the town for \$3,000⁵. This time he came to live in Pell City and brought his family, and histories of the town propose 1901 as the second founding. In fact, it was the occasion of his marriage in the previous year to Lydia McBain DeGaris of Memphis, a young widow with a substantial inheritance, that allowed this pivotal second purchase: it was Mrs. Cogswell who actually bought out of receivership the 50 or so acres belonging to the departed Hercules Pipe Company, which had "sprawled all over what is now the principal business area of Pell City."⁶

The following year, two major events occurred that were to heavily affect Pell City's fortunes: first, Mr. Cogswell and other investors built the Pell City Manufacturing Company's plant, a pioneer textile mill design and ultimately in 1919 to become a property, still in operation, of the Avondale Mills. Then, a second St. Clair County courthouse was established at Pell City to alleviate the extreme difficulty of traversing Backbone Mountain to get to Ashville, the old County seat, from the eastern part of St. Clair County. Although political manipulations curtailed the second courthouse for a few years, in 1907 other manipulations restored it, and local historians note that "(a)fter the re-establishment of the courts, Pell City began its real development."⁷

Another event of 1902 greatly affected the built town and always looms large in local histories, and that is the great depot explosion. In attempting to tunnel through that same troublesome Backbone Mountain, another of the small industrial railroad lines was storing explosives in the Pell City depot for delivery to the tunnel site. One night they caught fire and exploded, destroying everything near the depot and severely damaging the Maxwell Block on the main street, so that the front had to be rebuilt.⁸ Since there were people killed and buildings destroyed, coming back from this terrible accident represented a commitment of faith and energy on the part of the citizens, but they managed to rebuild and get back on the road to what became a steady growth. By 1903 the population was 700 in the town, and 1,500 if the mill villagers were counted.⁹

The little town grew as most towns did, with businesses locating along the main street, early called Howard and now Cogswell Avenue, and along its cross streets going the block down to Railroad Avenue. Sometimes merchants came from other small villages in the County such as Eden or Coal City, and sometimes they came from farther away on the strength of Pell City's promise as a railroad junction, a plant site, and a County seat. Several of the commercial buildings in the present district were built in the years just after 1902; interestingly, the oldest ones are those least altered or destroyed by later developments. Primary among these are the Pell City Drug Company of 1903 (Inventory #2) and the Pell City Hardware Company of 1904 (Inventory #6). Dry goods merchants, the Post Office, banks, a hotel, grocers, attorneys, and all the suppliers of necessary goods and services lined up along Cogswell Avenue. Telephone service arrived in 1903. Then in 1913 came the harbinger of another kind of business: the first automobile garage. Dealerships followed, one of which remains intact in the district though in a different use (Inventory #16), and a variety of service stations and garages sprang up, many of which survive.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 13

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====

Having been founded by railroads, Pell City in 1933 realized an important milestone in its prestige by succeeding in having the Bankhead Highway routed through the town. This put Pell City squarely on the main— paved!— driving route from Atlanta to Birmingham, and it was much celebrated. Elizabeth Cogswell Starnes' informal history of c. 1933 noted that "(t)he coming of the good roads brought other means of transportation in addition to the excellent railroad service that Pell City enjoys. Huge truck and bus lines routed their trucks and buses through here."¹⁰ Rail continued to be extremely important as well: the Seaboard connected to Gadsden and points north and east, and the Southern provided Pullman accommodations both east and west. And of course there was the Coosa, the importance of which to the city's future could only be guessed in 1933; Mrs. Starnes' history was somewhat prescient in this regard: ". . . with the completion of locks on the Coosa, which is assured in the near future, Pell City will grow by leaps and bounds, and will assume her natural place among the thriving cities of industrial Alabama."¹¹

After the Second World War Pell City experienced some of the changes that were occurring in many American towns. First, the old 1902 courthouse was deemed inadequate, and it was destroyed to make way for a new one; the new building, on the site of the old, was dedicated in 1956. Then, a movement to annex surrounding towns was on in the mid-1950s, during which years the older Eden and recent Oak Ridge were brought into the Pell City limits. Interestingly, 1956 also saw the annexation into the town of the Avondale Mill Village, which had never been within the city limits even though the mill itself was. When the WPA history of Alabama was published in 1941, it gave the population of Pell City as 835. The mid-1950s town mergers brought the population figure to 3,644.¹²

In the spreading out of the physical city in the wake of post-War vitality, downtown Pell City began to lose its magnet status and to see its commercial functions dispersed. The city has had many successes of the suburban sort, however, which have assisted in upholding its solvency, in combination with the fact that the Avondale Mill continues to operate and to be a focus of economic vitality. Among the later-day developments have been an airport and new industries, but the most obvious change has been the advent of recreational opportunities and residential expansion as the result of the damming of the Coosa by the Alabama Power Company in the mid-1960s. The creation of Lake Logan-Martin has made Pell City the main town in a resort community.

In a 1983 Birmingham *Post-Herald* series on regional towns, reporter and columnist Mitch Mendelson commented that "(o)ne of the city's outstanding features is its downtown business district. In an era of downtown decay, Pell City's downtown has sustained itself. One vacant storefront can be found along the four block area of Cogswell Avenue from 17th to 21st streets. The occupied buildings include such small town mainstays as hardware stores, drugstores, barber shops, clothiers, stationers, jewelers and auto parts-dealers."¹³

In the wake of rather drastic commercial and residential expansion, the City is looking once again at its downtown as a historic resource and an area to be maintained as a distinctive place.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 14

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

Notes

¹ Sumter Cogswell, "Keep your eye on Pell City," tract for Pell City Realty Company, 1909, pp. 14-16 *passim*.

² Frank V. Evans, "Pell City's name is no handicap," *Birmingham Age-Herald*, June 5, 1904.

³ Mattie Lou Teague Crow, "Pell City," chapter 6 in *History of St. Clair County, Alabama*, Huntsville, The Strode Publishers, 1973, p. 82.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Clyde W. Ennis, *A Pen Picture of Pell City and Sumter Cogswell, the Builder*, reprinted from the *St. Clair Times*, June, 1936, p. 2.

⁷ Elizabeth Cogswell Starnes, "History of Pell City," unpublished manuscript, n.d. (c. 1932), p. 7; Crow, p. 86. Quote is directly from both sources, apparently taken by Crow directly from Starnes.

⁸ *Birmingham Ledger*, March 24, 1903, reprinted in the *Pell City Observer*, October 23, 1975, p. 4-B.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Starnes, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹¹ Starnes, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹² Crow, *op. cit.*, p. 90. The discussion of later developments is generally based on Crow.

¹³ Mitch Mendelson, "Pell City: Aura of rail junction days attracts lake homeowners," *Birmingham Post-Herald*, September 26, 1983, p. C-4.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9/10 Page 15

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====
Major Bibliographical References

Elizabeth Cogswell Starnes, "History of Pell City," an undated typescript of c. 1932.

Mattie Lou Teague Crow, "Pell City," Chapter 6 in *History of St. Clair County, Alabama*. Huntsville: The Strode Publishers, 1973.

Pell City Public Library, historic files, clippings and photographs in the collection of the Library.

St. Clair County Courthouse, Ashville: the Department of Archives has a good collection of old newspapers including the *Coosa Valleyan* and the *St. Clair News-Aegis*.

Birmingham Public Library Microform collections of the *Birmingham Age-Herald*.

State of Alabama Archives, clipping files from St. Clair County.

Personal historical collections of Kate Hodges DeGaris, including clippings, photographs, land records, and correspondence.

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries are as shown on the attached map of the District, which is drawn on a St. Clair County tax map, scale 1" = 100'.

Justification of Boundary

Boundaries were drawn to include the greatest concentration of commercial buildings within the period of significance, which are almost exclusively contained in the chosen blocks. As explained in the Part 7 text on physical appearance of the district, the Courthouse block was omitted due to the 1956 construction of the present building, and the 1800 block across the street from it, while old enough, has undergone building alterations that preclude its contribution to the district.

On the east, the old downtown stops almost abruptly near 21st Street and trails into drive-in strip construction near Cogswell Avenue's intersection with Route 231. On the north, the alley between Cogswell and First Avenue North is the line because, other than the modernized Martin Hospital behind the corner drug store, the blocks across it are occupied by municipal and County facilities of later date. On the south the situation is similar, with only two buildings sitting on First Avenue South; the south alley therefore makes up the majority of the boundary on that side.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section Page
Photographs 16

Pell City Downtown District
St. Clair County, Alabama

=====

1. Cogswell Avenue, looking east from 19th Street— the usual post card view. Earlier post card views, however, were not obscured by so much modern street greenery.
2. North side of 1900 block of Cogswell Avenue, looking generally ENE. Inventory numbers L-R are #s 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10 and 12. 10 is invisible behind a tree; the Maxwell Block is at far right.
3. View over Western Auto (#17) on left, Pell City Motor Company (#16) toward U.S. 231, looking generally east.
4. South side of 1900 block of Cogswell Avenue, looking WSW. Inventory numbers L-R are #s 13, 11, 9, and 6.
5. Looking west up sidewalk of north side of 1900 block of Cogswell Avenue, from Maxwell Block storefronts on right up toward Pell City Drug Store.
6. Nixon's Texaco (#22) and Ellis Transmission (#25) buildings, looking generally north toward old residential district.
7. Looking west up Cogswell Avenue from in front of Dycus Drive-In (Inventory #18). Maxwell Block is in center of photograph.
8. This photograph is taken out of the district but is submitted to show the old railroad avenue: Looking west up First Avenue South from Pell City Tire Company corner (South 21st Street) toward what had been the oldest part of town. The depot was located on the 1800 block behind the gabled structure, a farm supply store, to the left of the picture; the Cornett Hotel was across the avenue from that.

PELL CITY DOWNTOWN DISTRICT
ST. CLAIR COUNTY, ALABAMA
LINDA NELSON, PHOTOGRAPHER
APRIL 2000
NEGATIVES: ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

PELL CITY DOWNTOWN
HISTORIC DISTRICT
ST. CLAIR COUNTY, ALABAMA

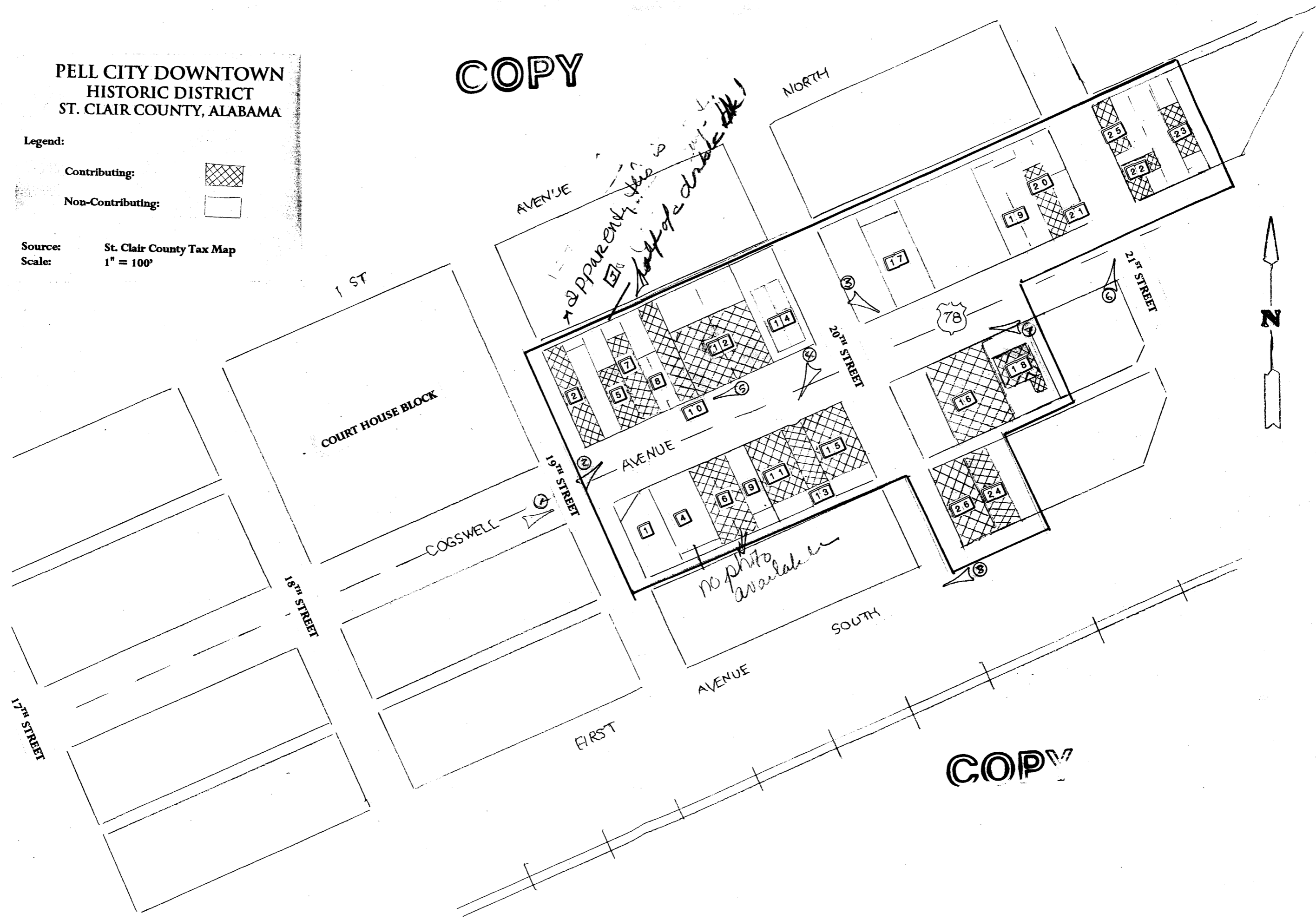
COPY

Legend:

Contributing: 

Non-Contributing: 

Source: St. Clair County Tax Map
Scale: 1" = 100'



COPY

PELL CITY DOWNTOWN
HISTORIC DISTRICT
ST. CLAIR COUNTY, ALABAMA

Legend:

Contributing:



Non-Contributing:



Source:

St. Clair County Tax Map

Scale:

1" = 100'

